News Releases
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador - Canada

Newfoundland Labrador

November 28, 1997
(Justice)

The following statement was issued today by Chris Decker, Minister of Justice and Attorney General. It was also read in the House of Assembly:

I rise in the House today to advise Honourable Members that government has decided to re-examine the arming policy of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary which provides policing services to St. John's, Mount Pearl and the northeast Avalon; Corner Brook; and Labrador West, including Churchill Falls.

The full arming of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary has been the subject of considerable discussion for a number of years. In particular, the discussion has centred around the wearing of sidearms on a full time basis by the Patrol Division of the force.

I must make it clear, as did the former Minister of Justice, that the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary is an armed police force. The current firearms policy, however, requires officers to place firearms in vehicle trunks and seek the permission of the divisional commander or designate to carry the firearms in the line of duty. Because of this policy, it is not unusual for an officer to park benind a shopping centre or other public building in order to arm himself or herself, taking valuable time out of what should be a direct route to attend to the situation at hand.

The policy clearly compromises public safety and the safety of RNC officers, especially because officers often cannot predict when firearms are going to be needed.

In the interest of ensuring the lives of the public and that of the officers are properly protected, government has decided to re-examine the current firearms policy to determine whether or not officers should carry guns on a continuous basis as part of their uniform. I would also like to point out that the members of the RNC are highly trained in the use of firearms, and they have demonstrated competence in their use through the many volatile incidents wherein they were required to wear them.

We are also interested in examining the issue of consistency. For example, in areas where boundaries overlap with the RCMP, such as Holyrood and Corner Brook, and in Labrador West where the RNC coordinates with the Quebec police, our officers are left exposed and susceptible in comparison to their armed counterparts. The RNC also serves in a jurisdiction alongside two armoured companies, Loomis Courier and Brinks, again leaving RNC officers vulnerable in responding to incidents involving the companies. Furthermore, to add to the inconsistency, RNC officers in Labrador do wear firearms for a large part of the year given the potential for weapons to malfunction in vehicle trunks due to freezing weather conditions.

As you can see, the current firearms policy of the RNC needs examination. Over the coming weeks, I, the Chief of Police, Len Power, members of the RNC, and many others will be discussing this issue publicly. Our objective is to raise the level of awareness on this important issue among the general public, and in the near future, to make the best decision regarding the future firearms policy for the RNC as we approach the new millennium. I also encourage Members of the House to pass along any views of their constituents on this matter.

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